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Mid-term review of the fifth country programme for Romania

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I. MID-TERM REVIEW PROCESS

1. The mid-term review of the fifth country programme for Romania (DP/CP/ROM/5), for the period 1993-1996, examined achievements thus far and considered various aspects which had hindered or might in the future hinder the progress of programme implementation, impact and sustainability. In preparation for the review, a team of representatives from the Government and the UNDP country office prepared the joint issues paper, which was discussed in depth during the review meeting, with the participation of representatives of various ministries and organizations involved in programme implementation. The month-long review culminated in a joint UNDP/Government meeting on 20 April 1995. Concrete suggestions and recommendations were made, on aspects ranging from policy to managerial and operational issues.

2. The joint issues paper emphasized three important issues: (a) the socio-economic environment and national development goals as the general framework for programme implementation, including changes and achievements since the programme's inception; (b) the relevance of the fifth country programme, in light of priorities prevailing at its approval and of subsequent socio-economic developments; and (c) prospective implementation of the country programme, with attention to the relevant concerns and issues of the Government and the UNDP Executive Board.

II. THE FIFTH COUNTRY PROGRAMME BACKGROUND

3. At the mid-term review meeting, the participants reviewed the national development goals and priorities, as reflected in the programme document and further elaborated in February 1993 in the Government's strategy for its programme for economic and social reform. The Government's strategy has remained unchanged since the inception of the country programme. Despite unavoidable difficulties specific to the transition period and some delays in implementation, the general orientation of the transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy has been steadily maintained.

4. At the core of the transition to a market economy are human resources development, privatization, the structural reform of various aspects of the economic sectors, particularly in industry, environmental protection and the establishment of social safety nets for the most vulnerable groups of the population.

5. During the last three years, major policy measures have been undertaken, in the areas of legislation, budgeting, monetary regulations, foreign trade, social security, health and education, in particular, leading to significant socio-economic changes in the lives of the Romanian people. Within that context, the mid-term review focused on the application of new laws and regulations on privatization, the foreign exchange mechanism, income taxation, the stimulation of foreign investments, the facilitation of export activities, the introduction of a value added tax, and the improvement of management techniques.

6. As a result of the policy measures discussed in paragraph 5 above, in cooperation with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, within the framework of the macroeconomic stabilization programme, significant results have already been achieved, including the establishment of a firm monetary and budget policy, the reduction of the trade balance deficit and the liberalization of the foreign exchange mechanism. More specifically:

(a) A sharp drop in the gross domestic product was halted and replaced by a modest increase of 1.3 per cent in 1993 and 3.4 per cent in 1994;

(b) Industrial output increased by 1.3 per cent in 1993 and 3.7 per cent in 1994;

(c) After a dramatic decrease during the period 1990-1991, agricultural output increased by 12.8 per cent in 1993 and 5 per cent in 1994, re-establishing Romania's self-sufficiency in food production;

(d) Noteworthy progress has been made in the area of exports, which increased by 12 per cent in 1993 and 28 per cent in 1994, out of which 42 per cent of exports were to countries in the European Union.

7. At the same time, the monthly inflation rate decreased from 12.6 per cent in 1993 to 4.1 per cent in 1994. The foreign trade balance deficit of previous years ($662 million in 1993 was replaced by a surplus of $190 million in 1994, and the budget deficit was reduced to 3.5 per cent of the gross national product (GNP) in 1993 and to less than 3 per cent of GNP in 1994. Furthermore, the national currency has been stabilized and foreign currency exchange mechanisms have been liberalized, resulting in a foreign currency reserve of some $2 billion in 1994, compared with $800 million in 1993.

8. Participants in the mid-term review affirmed that positive developments are expected in the future, with respect to all of the indicators discussed in paragraphs 6 and 7 above.

9. From discussions during the mid-term review, it became evident that progress has been made in the area of democracy and human rights. The multi-party democratic system established by the 1991 Constitution functions satisfactorily, and important achievements have been recorded in the area of human rights. The Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms, also known as the European Convention on Human Rights, has been signed and ratified.

10. Substantial progress also has been achieved with respect to the integration of Romania into the European economic and political structure. In September 1993, Romania joined the Council of Europe, and on 31 December 1994, it entered into an association agreement with the European Union, which came into effect on 1 February 1995.

11. Despite the above-mentioned promising achievements, Romania continues to face many difficulties. The unemployment rate rose to 12 per cent in early 1995, and foreign investments have been limited. Moreover, during the transition period, it has not been possible to avoid the deterioration of social

services, particularly health services, and the impoverishment of a significant part of the population. Those difficulties have been amplified severely by the economic problems caused by the implementation of the United Nations Security Council resolutions imposing sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). The UNDP country office has cooperated with the Romanian authorities to determine the magnitude of the losses suffered by Romania, as a consequence of the sanctions.

12. In addition, the limited number of enterprises privatized so far, approximately 1,000, most of them small- and medium-scale enterprises, out of more than 7,000 State-owned commercial companies, reveal delays in mass privatization.

13. Generally, however, participants in the mid-term meeting concluded that the development of Romania during the last three years revealed significant socio-economic improvements, as well as progress in the area of democracy, the country now being recognized as a component of stability in a troubled geographic area.

III. RELEVANCE OF THE COUNTRY PROGRAMME

14. As stated in paragraph 3 above, the national goals and priorities included in the Government's programme for economic and social reform and the fifth country programme remain valid. Consequently, at the mid-term review meeting, it was estimated that the fifth country programme, as originally formulated, continued to respond well to the present and emerging national priorities of Romania. It was underlined that the three areas of concentration in the country programme - human resource development, privatization and environmental protection and energy conservation - continued to be fully relevant for Romania, playing a catalytic role for complementary activities in the areas of other donors, during the present period of transition.

IV. PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION ACHIEVEMENTS

A. Human resources development

15. As stated in the country programme and reconfirmed during the mid-term review meeting, Romania has many well-trained technicians and engineers, in a variety of sectors. However, the country still lacks managers familiar with the modern management techniques required in a market-oriented economy. In the opinion of most of the participants in the meeting, such deficit must be addressed urgently, since well-trained managers were needed for the approximately 500,000 small- and medium-scale private enterprises set up since 1989. In addition, as a result of the expected acceleration of mass privatization, newly privatized companies will require managers fully familiar with up-to-date management techniques.

16. In this connection, it was noted that the projects for the improvement of the Romanian Management Training Institute (ROM/90/001) and the transfer of knowledge through expatriate nationals (ROM/91/004) had been designed to address

the need for enhanced economic management skills in the productive sector. Results achieved thus far in the first project have proven the relevance of its objectives and design. Within the framework of the project, in 1992, 1993 and 1994, over 3,500 managers of existing enterprises were retrained each year to acquire the skills required in a market economy. Moreover, the enhancement of the qualifications of the faculty at the Romanian Management Training Institute has been achieved through the recruitment of new professors, along with a transfer of knowledge and skills organized through cooperation arrangements with foreign business schools.

17. In order to increase product acceptability in Western markets, as well as to gain increased access to the same, the need to address the crucial issue of improving the quality of Romanian industrial products has led to the design and approval of a project to assist in the implementation of quality assurance practices in the Romanian economy (ROM/94/001) with cost-sharing with the Government of France. The project has two main objectives: (a) the training of a pre-selected group of Romanian quality assurance auditors, who will participate in training courses and conduct audits in enterprises side by side with experienced French quality auditors, and (b) the training of Romanian future trainers through their participation in a six-module course in the field of quality assurance. All of the project activities are being conducted by French consultants. At the mid-term review meeting, it was noted that the project makes a direct contribution to the practical restructuring of Romanian commercial enterprises, enhancing their efficiency and competitiveness.

B. Privatization

18. It was agreed that privatization of State-owned enterprises and the development of small- and medium-scale private enterprises represent key elements in the government strategy for the transition to a market economy. The contribution of the private sector to GNP formation is growing, already representing 35 per cent of its total. Therefore, privatization represents a prominent feature of the present country programme. The project to assist the National Agency for Privatization in setting up the privatization and restructuring process (ROM/91/006) and the project for the promotion of small- and medium-scale private enterprises (ROM/90/002), which together have been allotted more than one third of the UNDP financial resources for the country, address crucial problems of the complex privatization process in Romania at two levels: (a) the national institutional framework and mechanisms necessary to carry out the Government's mass privatization programme, and (b) the necessary support to the emerging and most rapidly growing sector of the economy, i.e., private enterprises.

19. In the above context, assistance to the National Agency for Privatization (ROM/91/006) has made a significant contribution to the establishment of the legal and institutional mechanisms for mass privatization. Assistance was provided for the creation of a State Ownership Fund and five Private Ownership Funds, to which the assets of all Romanian state-owned commercial companies were then transferred. Assistance was also provided for the design of a voucher system and their distribution, and for the transfer of knowledge in the field of asset valuation of enterprises to be privatized. Despite a slowing of the

privatization process, the new mechanisms put in place will play a key role during the acceleration of mass privatization presently planned by the Government.

20. It was estimated that the assistance provided through the project for support to small- and medium-scale private enterprises (ROM/90/002) has enabled the Government to define a strategy for the promotion of the emerging private sector. After the establishment in Bucharest of a centre to provide direct support for entrepreneurs through information and counselling, a network of 10 business support centres was established, with co-funding from the Government of the Netherlands and the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland's Know How Fund. All of the business support centres, which also provide direct counselling to entrepreneurs, are staffed by Romanian business advisers, trained within the framework of the project. The business support centres were instituted by local groups and authorities as independent foundations, thus ensuring their sustainability. In light of the positive results of the project, UNDP and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) decided jointly to establish a regional centre to promote small- and medium-scale private enterprises in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. At present, that regional initiative serves Albania, Kazakstan and the Republic of Moldova.

21. In the opinion of many participants in the review meeting, the private sector continues to face many difficulties in Romania. The procedures for the creation of new enterprises remain cumbersome, and an appropriate taxation system is still lacking. Insufficient information on business opportunities and advice on marketing techniques and quality standards, as well as a lack of capital, still hamper the growth of the private sector. Along with a lack of capital, insufficient information and advice on business opportunities, marketing techniques and quality standards still hamper the growth of the private sector. More attention should be devoted to these crucial issues, since solutions to these problems are often beyond the possibilities of small- and medium-scale enterprises.

22. In conjunction with the country-level activities described above, the regional project to support a privatization network for countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (RER/92/011) brought together key officials in charge of privatization to discuss privatization-related issues and to draw on the experiences of other countries in the region. The project is also financed by the European Union, through the Poland Hungary Aid for the Reconstruction of the Economy (PHARE) programme, which now covers central and Eastern European countries and the Baltic States, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).

C. Environment protection and energy conservation

23. During the decades of centrally planned economy, while heavy industrialization was a high priority, insufficient attention was paid to environmental issues or the use of high-energy technologies. Some 14 heavily industrialized and populated areas have been identified as sites where the

concentration of industrial pollution is considered a serious health hazard. The environmental clean-up of those areas is a high priority for the Government.

24. The project for the development of an action plan for reducing environmental hazards from industry (ROM/91/002), financed by UNDP Special Programme Resources (SPR), was designed to assist local authorities to prepare plans for an environmental clean-up of the industrial area of Bacau, one of the 14 heavily polluted areas mentioned in paragraph 23 above. That recently completed project succeeded in developing a methodology for empowering local authorities, and notably, the local environment protection agencies, with the capacity to design and implement action plans for industrial clean-ups. During the mid-term review, it was observed that the project had contributed significantly to raising awareness on environmental issues. As a result, a law calling for the harmonization of domestic regulations with international environmental standards, in line with those recommended by the European Union, has been debated in Parliament.

25. A significant factor in Romania's changing economy is the urgent need to reshape the energy sector, particularly the supply side, in terms of productivity, the environment, tariffs and conservation. The consumption of energy is highly inefficient, owing to a former policy of low energy tariffs and subsidies in the sector. This and other factors lead to a use of energy 3.5 times greater than in the countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

26. Another project (ROM/94/002) aims at establishing a training, information and dissemination centre on energy management. That centre is designed to increase the awareness of decision makers on energy management issues. The project, co-financed by the Governments of Canada, France, and the Netherlands, organizes 12 short intensive training courses per year, and for a period of three years, will train some 300 decision makers annually, in sound environmental techniques for energy production, transport distribution, energy management, and energy savings techniques. Each year, the project also will carry out a minimum of three case-studies of large, energy-intensive industrial enterprises. The project uses a combination of national consultants and international specialists, the latter providing the necessary back-stopping and support to their national colleagues to ensure updating of their knowledge and full transfer of skills.

27. Complementary to the projects discussed above, activities on environmental management in the Danube River Basin (RER/91/G31) and environmental management and protection of the Black Sea (RER/92/G31) have been developed within the regional projects financed through the Global Environment Facility (GEF). The main objectives of Danube River Basin are to: (a) create the framework for a long-term solution to the pollution problem in the Danube River Basin; (b) form the scientific, institutional and strategic basis for an action programme to address water pollution; and (c) provide technical assistance to identify key problems, develop overviews of the existing situation and establish networks for information exchange, training and institution-strengthening.

28. Activities for environmental management and protection of the Black Sea aim at: (a) playing a catalytic role in reversing the environmental degradation

process and unsustainable use of natural resources in the Black Sea; (b) providing coastal countries with a solid basis for developing long-term environmentally sound policies (including investment); (c) supporting institution-building at the national and international level to foster a sustainable framework for cooperation among Black Sea countries, the scientific communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector.

D. Other projects

29. In addition to the projects in the three main areas of concentration of the country programme, UNDP assistance has also been made available to finance other initiatives that aim at solving urgent problems and have an immediate impact.

30. A pilot project for the modernization of customs procedures (ROM/91/001) aimed at computerizing the process for customs declarations, using with Automated System for Customs Data software developed by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). That project was completed successfully, and the Romanian authorities have decided to use the software for the full computerization of their customs procedures. A large follow-up project, financed by the United Kingdom's Know How Fund and executed by UNCTAD, was approved recently, to provide technical support to the Customs Directorate for implementation of the modernization procedures.

31. A recently completed project for the improvement of facilities and customs procedures at the Giurgiu (Romania)/Russe (Bulgaria) border (ROM/93/004), co-financed by the United States of America, was instrumental in reducing the waiting period for trucks transporting goods through the border of the two countries from some 24 hours to approximately 15 minutes.

32. An export promotion project (ROM/91/005) co-financed by the Government of France was designed to assist the Government of Romania in the establishment of a centre for export promotion, which would provide information and direct support to exporting companies. Owing to delays in the establishment of the centre, the primary objective of the project has not been fulfilled.

33. The pilot project on women in development (ROM/93/003) aims at (a) setting up a policy unit and an advocacy group for promoting women's participation in policy design and civil society and (b) working with NGOs and international projects to promote gender sensitization activities, appropriate skills acquisition and women's entrepreneurship. The project has rapidly gained a solid reputation with the Government and donors alike. Its extension is now envisaged and co-financing from bilateral donors already has been secured.

34. UNDP also is assisting the Government in producing its first Human Development Report. This activity will enable the country to take full stock of its economic and social situation during the present period of transition. Data desegregated by gender and administrative districts have been gathered and processed by the National Commission for Statistics. It is expected that the report will create the foundation for broad participation in decentralized planning, with a strong focus on economic growth, job creation, social integration and environmental protection.

35. In addition to indicative planning figure (IPF) resources, UNDP assistance to Romania includes funds provided under Special Industrial Services (SIS) projects. Despite their small-scale character, SIS projects made an important contribution to solving some short-term problems, which appeared either after the approval of the present country programme or were urgent in nature. In particular, SIS projects have facilitated the smooth implementation of the fifth country programme in the field of industry. Close cooperation with UNIDO, to the satisfaction of both the Government and UNDP, should be underlined.

E. Resource mobilization

36. In light of the low IPF, resource mobilization has become a priority for UNDP in Romania. IPF-funded projects are viewed increasingly as ground-breaking efforts in priority areas, and resources for their extension and replication are sought systematically from other donors. Thanks to targeted efforts, during the past three years, the UNDP country office has managed to mobilize approximately $1.7 million in cost-sharing, an amount equivalent to 105 per cent of the IPF entitlement for the 1993-1996 programme period. Cost-sharing funds have been provided by the Governments of Canada ($50,000), France ($283,000), the Netherlands ($650,000), the United Kingdom ($237,000) and the United States of America ($482,000), for projects in priority areas, such as the development of the private sector, energy management, environment, women in development and rehabilitation of border-crossing checkpoints. The above-mentioned funds are additional to $500,000 in SPR funding for priority activities in the field of environment and women in development and the preparation of a national Human Development Report. Further efforts are being made to identify other possibilities for obtaining funds through non-IPF sources, such as SPR, TSS-1, TSS-2, GEF and Capacity 21.

V. PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

A. The programme approach

37. It was noted at the mid-term review that the programme approach is a main feature of the fifth country programme. In structuring the country programme by areas of concentration instead of individual projects, the programme approach enables UNDP and the Government to adjust activities to the rapid changes that characterize socio-economic development during the transition period. In addition, the impact of projects is maximized by the targeted use of limited financial resources.

38. UNDP interventions have supported the national authorities in the analysis of problems, the identification of sectoral and subsectoral objectives, and the formulation/modification of policies and programmes of action in important aspects of the transition to a market economy.

B. National execution

39. During the course of implementation of the country programme, and for the first time in Romania, the national execution modality was applied. Only a limited number of projects (four) are being executed using the national execution modality, mainly because of the present need to ensure the transfer of modern management techniques through foreign specialists trained and experienced in a market environment. However, thanks to the strong academic backgrounds of Romanian professionals, it is expected that this transfer of knowledge will be swift and that national execution will be used increasingly for future assistance. The excellent results in the transfer of knowledge and responsibilities to national professionals, under the project to support small- and medium-scale private enterprises (ROM/90/002), as well as in other projects, are strong indications that this perspective is realistic. In this connection, improved and simpler procedures for the application of the national execution modality would have to be explored, to ensure adequate technical back-stopping by specialized agencies.

C. Support cost arrangements

40. The complexities of the new support cost arrangements have required staff training and time. Because of the limitation of the share of resources allocated under TSS-1 and TSS-2 to the Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, Romania did not benefit as much as it would have liked from such additional support.

D. Cooperation with United Nations agencies and international financial organizations

41. Close collaboration has been maintained with other United Nations agencies, IMF, the World Bank, EBRD and the European Union. The UNDP country office participates regularly in periodic meetings with representatives of the Government and international institutions, to discuss problems of common concern, the progress achieved in the implementation of specific assistance programmes and aid coordination. In that connection, reference should be made to cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund on national projects, including a population and housing census and demographic surveys (ROM/90/P02) and an effort to strengthen the Government's family planning programme (ROM/93/P01). In addition, special mention should be made of close cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), in the preparation of the first Romanian Human Development Report. Collaboration with UNICEF is increasing in other areas of UNDP assistance, such as gender in development.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Conclusions

42. The three main areas of concentration of the fifth country programme remain relevant to the present needs of Romania, as specified in various government policy documents. Oriented towards key segments of the Government's reform strategy, the implementation of the country programme has had a positive impact on capacity-building in the institutions in charge of the respective areas of concentration.

43. Executive Board decision 94/16 of 10 June 1994 (DP/1994/55) to revise all IPFs down to 70 per cent of their original levels has significantly affected programme and project implementation in Romania, the country office having been obliged to curtail financial inputs to ongoing projects. Nevertheless, the reduced IPF funds have been expended swiftly, thus confirming the capacity of the country to absorb international assistance. In addition, the programme approach and national execution modalities offered possibilities to strengthen the capacity of local institutions to mobilize additional financial resources and to make full use of the vast human potential of the country.

44. As UNDP is no longer the main provider of external funds, co-financing, primarily through cost-sharing mechanisms, is now much more important than in the past for enlarging the scope of the organization's assistance. Cooperation with the donor community has been excellent and should result in increasing contributions in the coming years.

B. Recommendations

45. The following recommendations resulted from the mid-term review:

(a) Privatization, post-privatization, decentralization and environmental issues should be considered as priorities for future assistance;

(b) Increased use of national institutions and experts in the implementation and evaluation of projects also should be considered;

(c) In accordance with paragraphs 1 and 4 of General Assembly resolution 49/21 A of 2 December 1994 on "Economic assistance of States affected by the implementation of the Security Council resolutions imposing sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro)", appropriate measures should be taken to provide additional resources for technical assistance, in order to assist the Government of Romania in its efforts to alleviate the specific economic and social problems caused by the adverse impact of the sanctions;

(d) The identification of additional external funding sources to complement UNDP resources will be essential in the future;

(e) Continued cooperation with cost-sharing donors and the expansion of the programme approach and national execution modalities should be pursued vigorously.

Annex

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

I. RESOURCES

A. Resources available for country programme period

	$	$
IPF	1 617 200 a/	
Estimated cost-sharing	1 702 000	
Joint programme funding	-	
Total		3 319 200

B. Commitments

Approved programme/project budgets b/		
Approved and allocated IPF	1 535 000	
Approved and unallocated IPF	-	
Subtotal		1 535 000
Approved and allocated cost-sharing	1 702 000	
Approved and unallocated cost-sharing	-	
Subtotal		1 702 000
Pipeline programme/projects		
IPF	-	
Cost-sharing	-	
Subtotal		-
Total		3 237 000

C. Balance of resources available for further programming

IPF	82 200
Cost-sharing	-
Balance of resources available	82 200 c/

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a/ Compared to the $3,546,000 originally anticipated for the fifth cycle IPF; the reduction results from the revision of the IPF to 70 per cent of its originally established figure, plus carry-over from the fourth cycle ($207,000), less 1992 expenditure ($1,072,000).

b/ "Approved and allocated" refer to those programmes and projects approved by the Action Committee or Bureau PAC for which there exist detailed, signed documents and budgets. "Approved and unallocated" represent the balance of funds available to the programme or project which have yet to be reflected in specific budget lines.

c/ This figure represents the net balance of IPF cost-sharing resources available plus joint programme funding less approved and allocated/unallocated IPF and cost-sharing funding less pipeline IPF and cost-sharing.

(Thousands of dollars)

Area of concentration	IPF (P)	IPF (A)	Cost-sharing (P)	Cost-sharing (A)	Total (P)	Total (A)	Percentage of total (P)	Percentage of total (A)
Human resources development	664	543	700	145	1 364	688	33	21
Privatization	793	511	800	802	1 593	1 313	38	40
Environment/energy conservation	367	235	250	136	617	371	15	11
Other activities	193	246	250	619	443	865	11	26
Unprogrammed resources	128	82	-	-	128	82	3	2
Total	2 145	1 617	2 000	1 702	4 145	3 319	100	100

a/ Taking into account the 30 per cent reduction of IPF for the fifth cycle.

III. ESTIMATED COMPLEMENTARY ASSISTANCE FROM OTHER SOURCES

	At the time of formulation of country programme	At time of mid-term review
UNDP-administered funds		
Special Programme Resources	-	284 000
Other United Nations resources		
United Nations Population Fund	900 000	694 000
Global Environment Facility	1 200 000	2 500 000
Total	2 100 000	3 478 000